

CANTERBURY

Walking tracks in Aoraki / Mount Cook

| Aoraki / Mount Cook
National Park



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

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Check, Clean, Dry
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Welcome to Aoraki / Mount Cook National Park

Aoraki / Mount Cook National Park (70,696 ha) is Aotearoa New Zealand's great alpine park, boasting the highest mountains and the largest glaciers in the country. The area was formally established as a national park in 1953 and is a harsh land of ice and rock. Glaciers cover 40% of the park. There are 21 peaks over 3000 m high, including, of course, Aotearoa New Zealand's highest mountain, Aoraki / Mount Cook.

The park is also recognised for its outstanding natural values and forms part of the internationally celebrated Te Wāhipounamu – South West New Zealand World Heritage Area.

Enjoy one of the many walks or hikes around the village and environs; ranging from 10 minutes to 4 hours, there is something to suit everyone's ability.

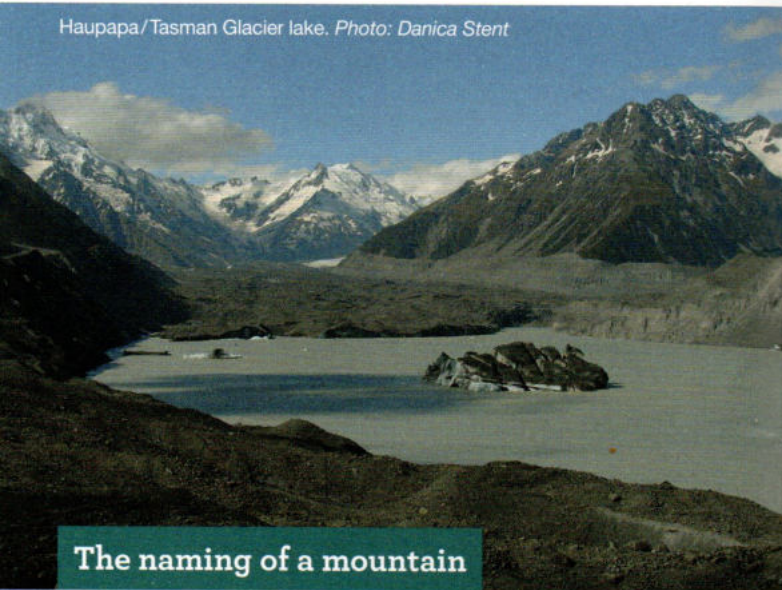
If you are doing an overnight walk, you will need to sign in at the Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) Visitor Centre and pay your hut fees before you go.

Glacier country

The glaciers that have helped shape the park's landscape include five major valley systems: Godley, Murchison, Tasman, Hooker and Mueller. There are also over 150 named smaller hanging glaciers on the mountainsides, which add to the dramatic landscape.

The Haupapa/Tasman Glacier is Aotearoa New Zealand's largest and longest glacier and is clearly visible from the main highway at the entrance of the park. It is about 22 km long, up to 3 km wide and extends over 100 km². Although covered with rock material in its lower reaches, the ice of the glacier is about 600 m deep near the Hochstetter icefall.

Haupapa/Tasman Glacier lake. Photo: Danica Stent



The naming of a mountain

The mountain from which Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park takes its name was originally named Aoraki by Ngāi Tahu, the first settlers in the area. It received its European name, Mount Cook, in 1851 from Captain J.L. Stokes, who first sighted the impressive peak as he sailed down the West Coast. Stokes named the mountain in honour of the English navigator of Aotearoa New Zealand, Captain James Cook.

In 1998, both names were officially recognised and the mountain is now known as Aoraki/Mount Cook.

The ancestor of Ngāi Tahu

Aoraki is an entity with his own mauri. His resting place within Te Manahuna/Mackenzie Basin is a place of awe, mana and cultural significance for many people. For Ngāi Tahu whānui, Aoraki and his surrounding peaks are ancestors frozen in stone by time. Like any other elders in Māori and Ngāi Tahu culture, they are afforded great respect.

There are different accounts as to how Aoraki and the surrounding landforms within Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park came to be. One such account is known as the Ārai Te Uru tradition and speaks of a great waka, the *Ārai Te Uru*, travelling to Aotearoa. As this waka travelled down the coast of Te Waipounamu/the South Island, it began to be troubled by the waves, eventually succumbing to the rough seas near Shag Point/Matakaea on the North Otago coastline where it capsized. Many of the passengers went to shore to explore the island. One of the passengers, Kirikirikatata, walked inland to explore with his grandson, Aoraki, sitting upon his shoulders. An instruction was given that all the passengers must return to where the waka lay by sunrise, lest they be turned to stone. However, many of the passengers, including Kirikirikatata and Aoraki, did not return to the waka in time, instead turning into many of the mountains and geographical features of central Te Waipounamu.

'Aoraki Matatū' is a phrase encouraging people to stand tall and strong like Aoraki. It reminds Ngāi Tahu to be inspired by their ancestral mountain and its leadership position within Te Waipounamu and Aotearoa as our highest peak.

Ngāi Tahu whānui see Aoraki not just as a mountain peak, but as an ancestor who stands among us all. As this whakataukī alludes to, this tipuna has strong leadership attributes that people aspire to instil in themselves and today's youth – standing strong in your identity, remaining steadfast in your beliefs and being a leader of others.

Safety

Warning

- The weather can change quickly here – high winds are common and snow can fall at any time of the year. Check the weather forecast regularly.
- Snow and ice conditions can be treacherous. Always walk with care over snow or ice.
- Avalanches can occur at any time of the year but are most common in winter and spring. Take special care when travelling through known avalanche areas and check the Avalanche Advisory (www.avalanche.net.nz).
- The alpine areas in the park are very exposed, and spending a long time in the sun or hot conditions can lead to dehydration and severe sunburn at any time of the year – go well prepared.

Care for Aotearoa



Protect nature

Keep your distance and don't feed wildlife. Follow any rules restricting dogs, fires, drones or vehicles.



Keep NZ clean

Take all rubbish with you and use toilets where provided.



Show respect

Respect others, respect culture.



Be prepared

Stay safe in the outdoors by following the Land Safety Code.

- ▶ Choose the right trip for you.
- ▶ Understand the weather.
- ▶ Pack warm clothes and extra food.
- ▶ Share your plans and take ways to get help.
- ▶ Take care of yourself and each other.



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



For more information, visit: www.mountainsafety.org.nz. Note that the maps in this brochure are a guide only and should not be used for navigation. The appropriate NZTopo50 series map for this area is BX15.

Track grades



Short walk: Well-formed track; easy walking for up to an hour.



Walking track: Well-formed track; easy walking from a few minutes to a day.



Tramping track: Mostly unformed track but has directional markers, poles or cairns.



Route: Unformed track suitable only for people with high-level backcountry skills and experience.

Walks from the village and campground

Governors Bush Walk



Time	1 hr return (loop track)
Grade	Short walk
Start place	Public shelter
Height gain	100 m – steps plus well-gravelled track

A delightful bush walk that joins with Bowen Bush Walk to form a nature trail and explores one of the few stands of tawai / tawhai / silver beech forest in the park.

A gradual climb leads to a lookout point of Wakefield Ridge and Aoraki / Mount Cook. This popular walk offers birdlife, a great view of the mountains and a sheltered place to experience the outdoors in poor weather.

Bowen Bush Walk



Time	10 min return (loop track)
Grade	Short walk
Start place	Opposite petrol pumps
Height gain	Predominantly flat with some steps

An easy forest walk that can be joined with Governors Bush Walk to form a nature trail. This track wanders through tōtara and mountain toatoa / celery pine forest, and has an alternative exit/entry towards the Mount Cook Lodge.

Glencoe Walk



Time	30 min return
Grade	Short walk
Start place	Behind The Hermitage hotel
Height gain	40 m – steps and some zigzags

This walk zigzags through tōtara trees with a ferny understorey, emerging at a lookout near the prominent water tanks above The Hermitage. A short climb rewards with a bird's-eye view of the village and beyond to the white ice of the Hooker Glacier and Aoraki/ Mount Cook. Sunrise and sunset are good times to catch the light playing over the mountains.

Red Tarns Track



Time	2 hr return
Grade	Walking track (steep with steps)
Start place	Public shelter
Height gain	300 m

Follow the track downhill from the public shelter to cross the bridge over Black Birch Stream and then climb steeply to the Red Tarns. The vegetation changes as you ascend from the valley floor to a superb panoramic viewpoint of the valleys below, the village and Aoraki/ Mount Cook. The tarns are named for the red pond weed that grows in them. An aptly placed seat allows you to recover your breath and enjoy the views. This is a magnificent spot to view the sunset in summer.



Red Tarns view. Photo: Hunter Smith

Kea Point Track



Time	2 hr return from the village 1 hr return from the White Horse Hill
Grade	Campground and car park Walking track
Start place	Across the road from Aoraki/ Mount Cook Visitor Centre towards Hooker valley
Height gain	180 m over 3 km

This walk gently winds its way through subalpine grasslands and scrub to the Mueller Glacier moraine wall. The track passes through a landscape that was formed in 1913 when a stream cut through from the glacier to the original Hermitage site, damaging the building. The walk ends at a viewing deck that gives stunning views of Mount Sefton, The Footstool, the Hooker Valley, the Mueller Glacier lake and Aoraki/ Mount Cook.

Sealy Tarns Track



Time	3–4 hr return
Grade	Walking track (steep with steps)
Start place	As for Kea Point Track, then branch off at the signpost
Height gain	600 m

Dubbed the 'stairway to heaven', 2200 steps take you straight up to the freshwater lakes of Sealy Tarns. This energetic walk provides spectacular views of the Hooker valley and peaks of the area, including Aoraki/ Mount Cook. An abundance of alpine flowers in summer and the views from the tarns make the effort worthwhile. The tarns are the halfway point to Mueller Hut.



Sealy Tarns. Photo: Michael Hamilton

Hooker Valley Track

Day
Hikes



Time	3hr return (add 1hr if starting from the village)
Grade	Walking track
Start place	As for Kea Point Track, or start at the White Horse Hill Campground and car park
Height gain	80m over 5km

The best time to walk this stunning track is at dawn when the first rays of sun creep over the Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o te Moana, including over Aotearoa New Zealand's highest peak, Aoraki/Mount Cook, and there are fewer walkers.

The track leads up the Hooker valley towards Aoraki/Mount Cook. It passes close to the Alpine Memorial (a great viewpoint) and Freda's Rock before coming to the viewing point of the Mueller Glacier and the first swing bridge.

Cross the Hooker River here and carry on to the second swing bridge. Look out for many different wildflowers along the way, including celmisia and the kōpukupuku/Mount Cook buttercup.

The track from the first swing bridge to the second travels between old moraine ridges and humps. Past the second bridge, the vegetation changes to more open tussock and a wider valley floor. A third swing bridge leads to the east Hooker and the source of the Hooker River. The track ends at the glacier lake, where there are amazing views of Aoraki/Mount Cook, the Hooker Glacier and the Southern Alps/Kā Tiritiri o te Moana. Return the same way, enjoying more views down the valley and across to the Sealy Range.



Hooker valley. Photo: Shellee Evans

Hooker Hut



Time:	4hr return
Grade	Tramping track
Start place	White Horse Hill Campground
Height gain	120m

Hooker Hut is the oldest hut in Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park. It was moved to a new location and fully restored between 2020 and 2021, with care taken to preserve its distinctive heritage features while providing a comfortable stay.

The route starts on the Hooker Valley Track, turning off shortly after the toilets at Stocking Stream. After trekking an unformed route through tussock and alpine scrub, the route enters the bed of Stocking Stream before following marker poles to the hut.

With Mount Sefton and the Tewaewae Glacier towering overhead, the hut also offers breathtaking views northwards to Aoraki/Mount Cook.

A fireplace, gas cooker and toilet facilities are available at the hut.

Bookings can be made online at www.doc.govt.nz.

Hooker Hut. Photo: David Sagar





Mueller Hut Route



Time	3-5 hr one way
Grade	Tramping track (steep) Route in winter
Start place	As for Sealy Tarns Track
Height gain	1000 m

We recommend the NZTopo50 BX15 map for this route.

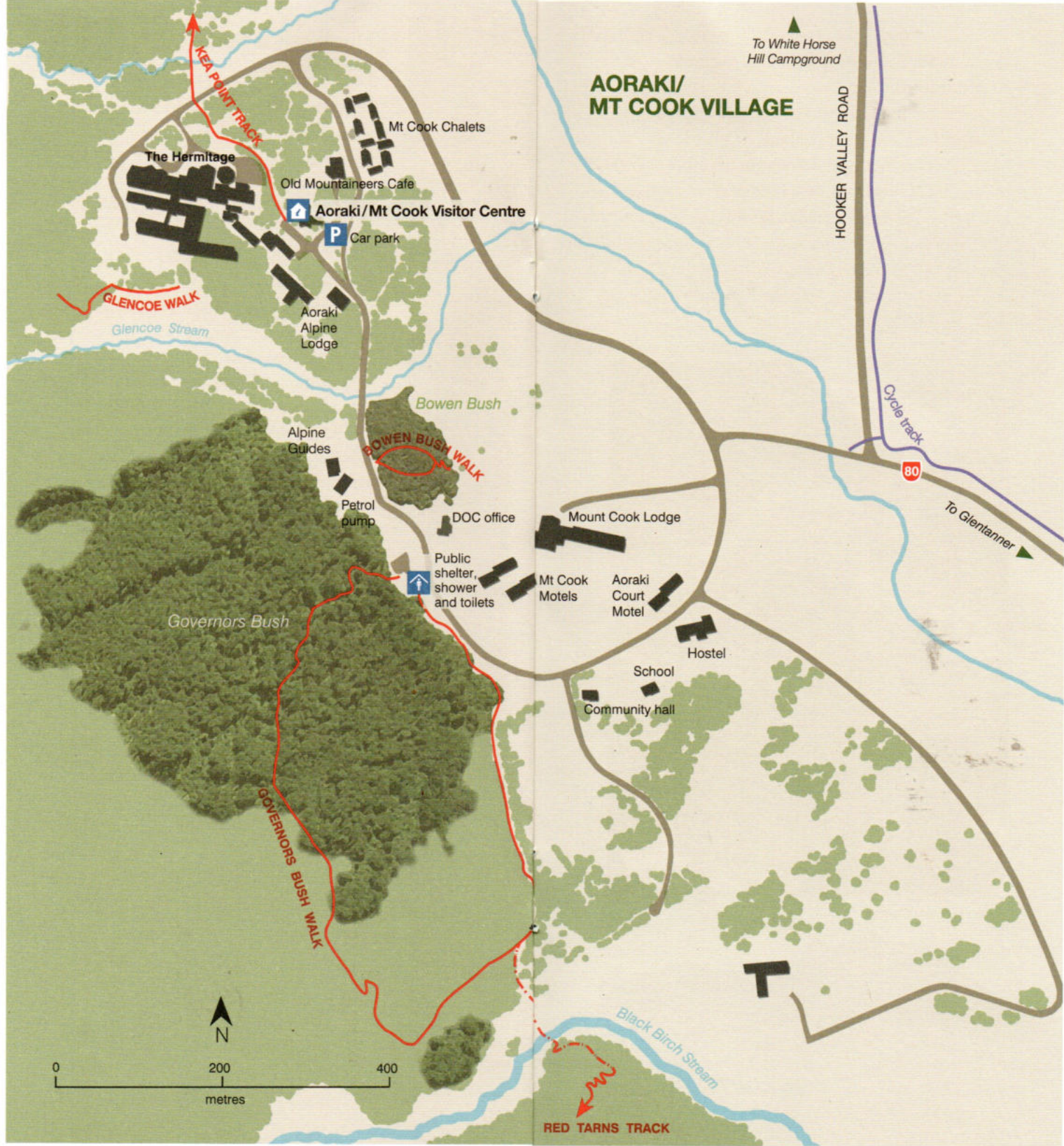
Spectacular panoramic views, a large hut and amazing landscapes are the drawcards for this strenuous walk. During the summer months (December-February), this route offers a mountain experience for anyone with moderate tramping experience - if you take good care. During the winter months (June-August), the route requires a good level of mountaineering experience, including walking on ice and snow with ice axe and crampons, route finding, and using an avalanche transceiver, probe and shovel. Check with the DOC staff at the Aoraki / Mount Cook Visitor Centre for current mountain conditions.

During the summer months, you can book this hut online at www.doc.govt.nz.

In winter, you need to call in to the Aoraki / Mount Cook Visitor Centre to sign into the park's intention system and pay hut fees before heading to the hut.

Key to symbols

	Car park		Road
	Toilets		State highway
	Shelter		National Park boundary
	Campsite		Short walk
	Hut		Walking track
	Information centre		Tramping track
			Route
			Four-wheel drive



AORAKI/ MT COOK VILLAGE

To White Horse
Hill Campground

HOOKER VALLEY ROAD

Cycle track

80

To Glenfarnham

The Hermitage

Mt Cook Chalets

Old Mountaineers Cafe

Aoraki/Mt Cook Visitor Centre

Car park

Aoraki
Alpine
Lodge

Glencoe Walk

Glencoe Stream

Bowen Bush

BOWEN BUSH WALK

Alpine
Guides

Petrol
pump

DOC office

Mount Cook Lodge

Public shelter,
shower and
toilets

Mt Cook
Motels

Aoraki Court
Motel

Hostel

School

Community hall

Governors Bush

GOVERNORS BUSH WALK

Black Birch Stream

RED TARNS TRACK

N

0 200 400
metres

Freda du Faur was the first woman to climb Aoraki/Mount Cook. She accomplished this amazing feat in 1910 with the help of two guides, brothers Alex and Peter Graham. In 1913, Freda completed the first Grand Traverse (all three peaks) of Aoraki/Mount Cook with guides Peter Graham and Darby Thompson. Freda's Rock is the site where her now-famous photograph was taken just after her first successful ascent of the mountain. For further information, visit the Aoraki/Mount Cook Visitor Centre.



Photo: G.E. Mannering

Walks in the Tasman valley

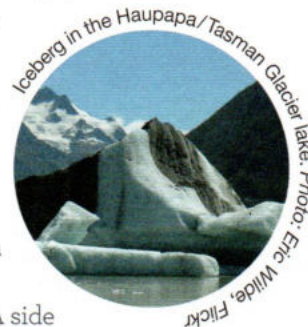
Blue Lakes and Tasman Glacier View Track

Short
Walks



Time	40 min return
Grade	Walking track (with steps)
Start place	Blue Lakes car park
Height gain	100 m

From the car park, walk past the Blue Lakes shelter and meander up past the Blue Lakes to a viewpoint on the moraine wall. There are good views of the lower Haupapa/Tasman Glacier and lake, icebergs, and the mountains at the head of the valley. A side trip to the Blue Lakes offers good swimming in summer.



At about 22 km long, the Haupapa/Tasman Glacier is the longest glacier in Aotearoa New Zealand. Unfortunately, glaciers the world over are shrinking, with the Tasman receding over 100 m per year.

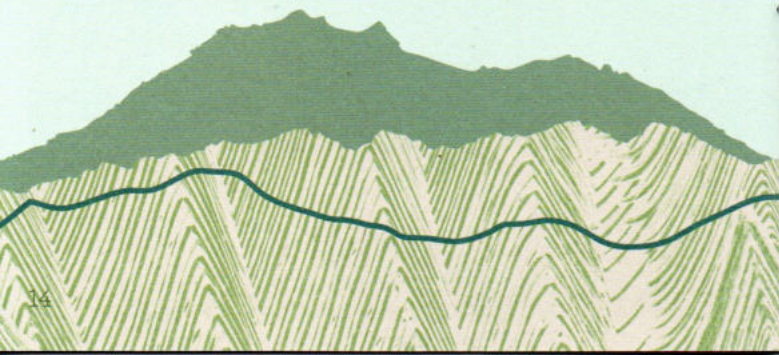
Tasman Lake Track



Time	50 min - 1 hr return
Grade	Walking track
Start place	Blue Lakes car park
Height gain	None

This walk branches to the right off the Blue Lakes Track just past the Blue Lakes shelter and leads to a viewpoint of the Haupapa/Tasman Glacier terminal lake. A further track branches to the right off this track leading to the source of the Tasman River. Icebergs can usually be seen floating in the lake in summer, and the lake freezes over in winter. The track leads through the old terminal moraines of the glacier, and you can see good examples of plant succession along the route.

The Tasman Lake is a relatively recent addition to the scene, starting its formation in 1974 and growing steadily since then. It is now large enough to take commercial boat and kayak tours. The large terminal moraines mark the foot of the Haupapa/Tasman Glacier at the time of the lake's formation and are a sobering reminder of the glacier's retreat.



Cycling

Track grades



Easy / Grade 2: Mostly flat with some gentle climbs on smooth track with easily avoidable obstacles, such as rocks and potholes.

Hooker valley



Distance 2 km
Grade Easy / Grade 2
Start place Aoraki / Mount Cook village - veer left at the Hooker Valley Road intersection
Height gain 50 m

This cycleway runs alongside Hooker Valley Road to the White Horse Hill Campground and car park. It provides stunning views of the Southern Alps / Kā Tiritiri o te Moana along its length.

Tasman valley



Distance 8.5 km
Grade Easy / Grade 2
Start place Aoraki / Mount Cook village - veer right at the Hooker Valley Road intersection and head towards the Tasman valley
Height gain 100 m

This cycle trail takes cyclists out to the Blue Lakes car park in the Tasman valley. Follow the Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail from either the White Horse Hill Campground or the Aoraki / Mount Cook village as far as the road bridge on Tasman Valley Road. Cycle along Tasman Valley Road to the Blue Lakes car park. Take care as the road can be busy with cars and buses. From here, leave your bike and walk to the Haupapa / Tasman Glacier viewpoint or lake, where you will be rewarded with expansive views of the glacier, moraines and the river winding its way along the valley floor.



Photo: Rachel Gillespie



NOTE:
Cycling is only allowed on the Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail and formed roads in the National Park.
Cycling is **NOT ALLOWED** on the walking tracks in the park.

Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail (National Park section)



Distance 5 km
Grade Easy / Grade 2 - downhill to the airport
Start place Aoraki / Mount Cook village - as for the Tasman valley, then take the Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail at the Hooker River road bridge
Height loss 60 m

It is all downhill to the airport on this section of the Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail! Make sure you stop and take a look behind you from time to time to view the Southern Alps / Kā Tiritiri o te Moana as you spin down the Tasman valley.

This is the first section of the Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail, which leads all the way to Oamaru. From the airport, you need to take a short helicopter ride across the valley to continue on the cycleway through to Twizel and beyond.

Nature walking and wildflower spotting

Pick up the *Nature-trail* guide (can be purchased from the Visitor Centre) and visit one of the short walks in the village for a true nature-trail experience. Use the guide and the plant labels through both Governors and Bowen bush walks to help you identify the plants and birds in the park.

Wildflowers abound from October to March, and the Hooker Valley Track is a great place to see these.



Riroriro / grey warbler

(more commonly heard than seen)

Photo: M. Hamilton



Pīwakawaka / fantail

Photo: DOC



**Kārearea /
New Zealand falcon**

Photo: Shellie Evans



Miromiro / tomtit

Photo: Leon Berard



**Pūtakitaki /
paradise shelduck**

Photo: Shellie Evans



Common skink

Photo: DOC



Kea

Photo: S. Jackson



**Common copper
butterfly**

Photo: © Janice McKenna



Tititipounamu / rifleman

Photo: Andrew Walmsley
andrewwalmsleyphotography.com



**Black mountain ringlet
butterfly**

Photo: DOC



Boulder copper butterfly

Photo: Jon Sullivan



Red admiral butterfly

Photo: DOC



Gentian

Photo: Shellie Evans



Large mountain daisy

Photo: Shellie Evans



Bush snowberry

Photo: Shellie Evans



**Kōpukupuku /
Mount Cook buttercup**

Photo: DOC



Paper daisy

Photo: J.H. Johns



Taramea / spaniard

Photo: DOC



WARNING

In summer, the native tutu shrub flourishes throughout the Hooker valley walks.

All parts of this plant, including its berries, contain a poison called tutin.

Do not eat any tutu berries and wash your hands after touching any part of the plant.



Photo: David Sagar



Photo: Peter Morrison

Further information

Aoraki / Mount Cook National Park Visitor Centre

1 Larch Grove
Aoraki / Mount Cook
Mount Cook National Park 7999

PHONE: 03 435 1186

EMAIL: mtcookvc@doc.govt.nz

www.doc.govt.nz

Alps 2 Ocean Cycle Trail

www.alps2ocean.com



Travelling with children?

Check out the Toyota Kiwi Guardians programme at www.doc.govt.nz/kiwiguardsians, or talk to the Aoraki / Mount Cook Visitor Centre staff.

Cover photo: Kea Point Track. *Photo: The Hermitage*

This information was accurate at the time of printing.
For the latest information on DOC's policies and facilities, visit www.doc.govt.nz.

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**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**
New Zealand Government



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